

Congress Daily, May 20, 2004

Breaking with a decision this week by the Senate, the House voted today to oppose the Bush administration's effort to proceed next year with a new round of military base closings. The vote came on an amendment by Reps. **Mark Kennedy**, R-Minn., and **Vic Snyder**, D-Ark., to strip from the FY05 defense authorization bill a provision calling for a two-year delay of the 2005 base realignment and closure round. The White House raised a veto possibility of the entire \$447 billion authorization bill if the BRAC language remained in the measure. The House voted, 259-162, to retain the two-year delay in the bill, with 103 Republicans and 155 Democrats, along with the House's lone independent, voting against the president's position. Base closure supporters argued that the long-term savings would free up billions of dollars that could be used for high-priority modernization purposes. "We need more beans and bullets for our soldiers and sailors," said Rep.

Mark Kirk

, R-Ill., "not someone standing useless guard duty outside an empty, unneeded building that should have been closed long ago." He said two base closures in his district during the first BRAC round had spawned multimillion dollar civilian redevelopment projects that produced more local jobs than the bases had provided.

BRAC opponents argued that the costs of closing bases would exceed the actual savings from shutting them down. "It's the wrong time now, when we're at war, to close bases," said Rep. **Jo Ann Davis**

, R-Va. She said it would cost \$10 billion or more to close them at a time when that money could be used to help pay for the war in Iraq and Afghanistan. She added that no savings from the closures would be seen until 2011 and later. Other opponents said further base closures should await completion of the Pentagon's forthcoming Global Posture Review to determine how the military should be reconfigured over the next several years. "Until we get our global strategy and footprint settled," said Rep.

John Murtha

, D-Pa., "we shouldn't be closing bases that we might need later."

The House adopted an amendment, 308-114, offered by Rep. **Curt Weldon**, R-Pa., to authorize destruction of the Abu Ghraib prison, the Baghdad lockup where Iraqi detainees were allegedly abused by U.S. forces. The House adopted 410-0 an amendment by Armed Services ranking member **Ik**

e Skelton

, D-Mo., that calls for new Defense Department guidelines for dealing with sexual assaults against military personnel. At presstime, the House was debating an amendment offered by Rep.

Ellen Tauscher

, D-Calif., to transfer funds from nuclear weapons research and development to programs to

improve conventional bunker-busting capabilities and intelligence required to defeat such hardened targets.